

The 'beet' goes on

Kiel brings agricultural, educational experience to Capitol

By SUE HEGARTY

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Sugar beet farmer Lonni Kiel ran three unsuccessful campaigns against longtime



Rep. Debra Kiel

Rep. Bernie Lieder. No surprise there, since Lieder was a respected leader and Lonni was forced to choose between door-knocking or getting his sugar beets out of the field. He chose the latter, his livelihood. Then the Kiels changed their strategy. Debra Kiel, Lonni's wife, a member of the Crookston School Board, filed for state office instead. "I normally do work in the field, but this year I didn't," she said. Their son, Christian, also works in the family business.

She thinks political sentiment played a role

in her successful bid. "While (Lieder) was well-liked on both sides of the fence, I think the feeling was it was time for a change," she said. Lieder served 13 terms.

Longtime Republican Party activists, the Kiels started dating when they both worked on former U.S. Congressman Arlan Stangeland's campaign.

Debra's experience in agriculture and education landed her seats on the House Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Finance and the House Education Reform committees.

She supports alternative pathways to licensure for teachers.

"I found it really frustrating that there were mandates, control over what we ourselves can work on as the local school board or township," she said. "We actually have an instructor in our school that we let go every May. She resigns and we hire her back

DISTRICT 1B

Population (2009 est.): 35,915

Largest City: Crookston

Counties: Marshall, Pennington,

Polk, Red Lake

Top Concern: To have the freedoms to be productive in Northwest Minnesota

every August because she has a licensure to fill an early childhood spot within her social work license, but not the education portion of it. We advertise for that instructor every year and she's the only one to apply."

Kiel also serves on the House Transportation Policy and Finance Committee and is vice-chairwoman of the House Legacy Funding Division.

In addition to Christian, the Kiel's have three other children; their ninth grandchild is due very soon. Both she and Lonni are Crookston natives. Her great-great-grandfather, John Perry, served in the House from 1921-1922. He also was a Polk County farmer.